

Good afternoon, distinguished members of the Human Services Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about HB 6860 and to express my thoughts on the bill.

My name is Sara Senft and I am 33 years old. Back in December 2013, I was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome and several other conditions that often co-occur. On a similar note, I have had many social, learning, and related difficulties obtaining and maintaining work over the course of my teenage and adult years. That said, the matter at hand is very personal.

Let me tell you about my own experience. From 2000 to 2008, I was a client of the BRS. They helped by paying a large portion of my college costs, but beyond that I got very little help. If I were to pursue working with the BRS again and they provided and/or offered additional services, I would be in a better position in terms of my work situation. For example, having a mentor or job coach to turn to would really help me better understand what is expected of me, how to handle difficult or awkward situations, etc. That, in turn, would allow me to feel better about my employment future and make better use of all I have to offer.

Although I am generally pro-HB 6860, I have some concerns. The qualifying ages are currently 25 to 31 years. This is a good start, but that age range leaves gaps on both ends. On the younger end, this means that some young adults in need of help would not

yet qualify because many youth/young adult services run out by age 22, sometimes as early as 18. What would happen to them between surpassing the cutoff age for those services and the minimum qualifying age for the proposed program?

Then there are the “oldies,” like me. Plenty of people still receive a diagnosis later in life, despite it starting to happen earlier in recent years. This is even more common amongst underserved populations, such as women and people with limited English proficiency. If the maximum age for entry were to stay at 31 years, what would happen to them after they age out?

In conclusion, I am generally supportive and do favor going forward with a pilot employment program for adults on the Autistic Spectrum. Despite a favorable opinion, I have concerns about the limited age range and I encourage you to explore alternatives. These can include extending the age range on either or both ends, creating a second program with different age requirements, or something else that you come up with later. Just like non-Autistic adults, we too have gifts, hopes, and dreams that we want to realize. With the right supports, we can make it happen. Thank you for your time.